

**Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission
Meeting Minutes
January 16, 2003**

Agenda Items

1. Call to Order, Determination of Quorum, Approval of Today's Agenda & Minutes of the Last Meeting

Vice Chair Wayne MacCallum called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

Mr. MacCallum noted that Chair Ed Parker was absent due to minor surgery. Mr. Duncan McInnes mentioned that Mr. Charlie Thoits was absent having recently received two replacement knees.

Mr. Tom Menard motioned to accept the agenda and Mr. McInnes seconded the motion. There was no change to the agenda.

Mr. Ron Regan moved to accept the Minutes from the October 23, 2002 meeting. Mr. Bob Jones seconded the motion and the Minutes were approved.

2. Report of the Executive Assistant

Ms. Janice Rowan provided a report on Commission activities:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2003 budget has not been finalized. However, new funds are only expected for the completion of a water treatment system at the Pittsford NFH. A formal letter to the basin's legislative delegation reiterating CRASC needs and requesting joint support for a member request in the 2004 appropriations bill is needed this month. The 2005 budget process is already underway. Committee assignments in the 108th Congress have changed and may not be as favorable as in the past.

A U.S. Geological Survey State Partnership Proposal was submitted in December 2002 on behalf of the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission to fund USGS research in genetic marking and management of Connecticut River Atlantic salmon.

The Connecticut River Migratory Fish Restoration Program brochure and leaflets have been revised, printed and distributed to most of the cooperators by the Coordinator's office.

Mr. Steve Rideout, USGS Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center, has provided a display case inside this meeting room to house recent awards earned by the Commission.

The Administrative Report, a summary of CRASC finances and correspondence is attached.

Discussion:

Mr. Jaime Geiger explained the status of the 2003 Federal budget: Eleven unfinished budget bills remain and those agencies are operating under a continuing resolution that is good through January; new Committee Chairs have been appointed; and, an omnibus bill is expected to be up for consideration by the end of the month. While the current budget bill has not been released, it is expected that it will not cover all uncontrollable cost increases and an across-the-board budget cut has been proposed by the Chair of Appropriations. Adds to the 2003 budget may be beyond our reach at this point. Consequently, it is not possible to assure the Commission that the current level of operations in the program will be maintained in 2003 by the USFWS.

However, a better funding scenario is expected in 2004 which should provide opportunities for increased funding to the program. Communications now with legislators by the Commission, Commission member agencies and supporting non-government organizations will set the stage for potential funding in 2004.

Mr. Geiger assured the Commissioners that the Director of the USFWS is aware of CRASC needs. He said the Assistant Director of Fisheries and Habitat Conservation was less aware of those needs. He indicated that he would be communicating directly with Mr. Steve Williams next week in Washington, DC.

Mr. McInnes questioned the mixed-message that he had received while in DC regarding the internal USFWS priority of CRASC funding regionally and nationally. Mr. Geiger provided clarification: The Regional director has established CRASC as a high priority for the Fisheries Program but this priority is not shared by the Assistant Director in DC and her position is slightly different from that of the Director (largely due to the intervention of certain Commissioners for the CRASC initiative); funds are allocated by DC to the Regions; the Regional Directors have some spending discretion; unless funds are tied to some specific appropriation language, they tend to be absorbed into the pot. The bottom line is that if there is an increase in 2004, the program will likely benefit.

Mr. McInnes pursued the question further asking for clarification on Congressional versus USFWS support. Mr. Geiger explained that USFWS support is understood as a priority if the CRASC is mentioned in the President's budget. Congress sees that as an agency commitment.

Mr. MacCallum proposed a letter to the Director on this account. Mr. Geiger indicated that this would be helpful as something the Regional Director could carry forward internally as well. Mr. Regan moved to send such a letter. Mr. McInnes seconded the motion. The motion was approved with Mr. Geiger taking the lead in drafting the letter to the director on behalf of the Commission. The draft is to be forwarded to the Chair and subsequently to the Commissioners for review before it is finalized, signed by the Chair, and sent during the first week of February.

Mr. MacCallum pointed out that the letter could be useful at the International where he and Mr. Regan serve on the Federal Budget and Legislation Committee. It may help inform the Director's presentation on the 2004 budget.

The Commission agreed to send a second letter to reiterate the CRASC needs and specifically request funding in 2004 (draft included in packets). The Commissioners agreed to send this letter using the same review process and deadline.

Mr. Geiger encouraged independent follow-up with legislators emphasizing the unique state role/benefits and their relationship to the basin-wide restoration program. He expects the 2004 budget process to be more stream lined and emphasized a need to get requests and concerns in early.

Mr. MacCallum summed up the discussion saying that the states are in transition driven by fiscal crisis. This may lead to real change resulting in turmoil and reorganization that has the potential to impact CRASC. He urged everyone to act now.

3. Report of the Technical Committee Chair

Mr. Jay McMenemy provided a summary of the activities of the Technical Committee:

Fish Culture Workgroup

Spawning/Egg Production/Egg Incubation

The egg take for 2002 was 11.7 million, about a million more than projected but short of our 15 million goal. Fry stocking this spring will probably be slightly higher than last year's reduced level. The fry allocation meeting is scheduled for March 12.

White River NFH shipped 190,000 eggs to Warren SFH. Warren has not been used by our program in several years due to concerns about IPN and BKD. They will be tested for disease prior to stocking. Due to high incubation temperatures, the fry will need to be fed for about a month prior to stocking.

A meeting will be held in February to consider the USFWS proposal to raise smolts at White River NFH. We are still awaiting a proposal with details of the proposed rearing regime and how it would be funded.

The USFWS was able to find sufficient funds to allow domestic brood stock, proposed for stocking due to budgetary concerns, to be retained for egg production at North Attleboro NFH. Surplus brood stock will also be shipped from White River NFH to Cronin NSS to allow continued disease research and for public outreach efforts.

Pittsford National Fish Hatchery

The USFWS provided funding for multivalent vaccine to protect the smolts at Pittsford NFH against furunculosis and *Vibrio*. A multi agency work crew vaccinated the smolts and clipped their adipose fins in November. The states will have to provide the bulk of transportation for the smolts (90,000) in the spring. Details on stocking locations and transportation have not been finalized.

Fish Passage Workgroup

Hydro Licensing

A variety of improvements to upstream and downstream passage are underway as a result of the recent relicensing at the Holyoke project. Some preliminary work on the fishlift will be done this summer including installation of a new entrance gate and work on retaining walls to allow operation at higher flows.

PGE National Energy Group is selling all of their hydro projects. This includes the Deerfield project, Fifteen Mile Falls, Vernon, Bellows Falls, and Wilder.

Upstream Passage

Further evaluations of the Turners Falls fishways will be done in 2003 to address the severe problems with shad passage. A meeting is scheduled for next week to discuss the next steps.

Salmon Studies Workgroup

One of the radio-tagged salmon adults entered the Rock River, a West River tributary, at spawning time. Although spawning was not confirmed, there is abundant spawning habitat and mature male parr in this reach of the Rock. As of mid December this salmon was holding in the lower West River and another was in the Deerfield River.

The smolt estimate calculated from index station assessments has not been finalized but will likely be down slightly from last year's high level.

Other

The draft *Management Plan for Blueback Herring in the Connecticut River Basin* was distributed at the last CRASC meeting for review.

The American eel management plan draft should be ready for the October CRASC meeting.

The Connecticut River Migratory Fish Research Forum will be held on February 11 at the USFWS Regional Office.

Mr. David MacDuffee is the new Technical Committee representative for NMFS.

Vermont Yankee Nuclear Plant has been sold to Entergy who is proposing to relax thermal discharge limits. Agency staff are reviewing their proposal.

Dr. Kevin Friedland of the UMass/NOAA CMER Program has developed a proposal at the request of and in cooperation with the Technical Committee to evaluate survival and behavior of smolts in the lower river and estuary using acoustic tags. The proposal would expand the acoustic tagging study done by Dr. Alex Haro of the Conte Lab. This would begin to address the concerns about smolt mortality in the lower river raised by CRASC at the January 2002 meeting.

Discussion:

First, Mr. Geiger extended thanks to all who assisted in vaccinating the smolts at the Pittsford NFH. Then he endorsed the smolt survival study proposal as a way to get needed preliminary information on the survival and behavior of smolts in the estuary. He recommended that the Technical Committee seek funding for the project.

Mr. MacCallum questioned the priority of this research in relation to other ongoing work like the genetics research, all of which appears to be on track. He pointed out that it would be helpful to know what potential sources of funding exist and if there is anything that the Commission can do to facilitate funding from these sources. In this regard, Mr. Geiger proposed that the Commission send a letter of support for such research to the Regional Administrator at NOAA, citing the importance of this data to the international community and urging a balanced effort between addressing protected resources and the rest of the salmon restoration programs. Since the project is time sensitive if equipment is to be procured for spring deployment, it is important to appeal for immediate funding to cover the equipment cost, at a minimum.

Mr. Menard motioned to have such a letter sent to NOAA by the Commission during the first week of February. Mr. Colosi was asked how he felt about this. He replied that “as long as the context of the letter was to ascertain the opportunity and availability of NMFS funds that might be applied to help fund the study, and that in responding to CRASC, the prerogatives of the Regional Administrator are respected in view of all other NMFS program budget responsibilities, I could support such a letter.” Mr. Regan seconded the motion. All agreed that Mr. Peter Colosi would draft the letter. In addition, Mr. MacCallum stated with respect to the letter, that if it was indicated that there would be a NMFS internal issue with the letter, he could exercise his prerogative as CRASC Vice Chair to retract this action.

Mr. Geiger pointed out that another potential source of funds for the project is the NASCO Research Fund. He proposed that the matter be discussed with the Chair and the U.S. Commissioner. Mr. MacCallum urged Mr. Geiger and Mr. Jacobson to pursue this matter further.

Mr. Geiger suggested that the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation was another potential source of funding. It might be possible to package this study with other unfunded or underfunded research projects. Mr. McInnes agreed to discuss the potential of this source with his NFWF contact and to explore the timing and feasibility of short verses long-term fund availability through this process. The Technical Committee was charged with developing a proposal commensurate with Mr. McInnes’s findings.

Mr. Geiger congratulated the Technical Committee for developing a herring management plan. He motioned to adopt the *Management Plan for Blueback Herring in the Connecticut River Basin* since it was compatible with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Plan. Mr. McInnes seconded the motion and the plan was adopted.

Mr. Regan proposed that the Commission follow-up this action with a news release. This plan is an example of the holistic approach that the Commission has taken; it exemplifies the fact that the Commission has always been about more than salmon; and, it enhances the Commission's credibility. Ms. Rowan agreed to draft a news release.

Mr. Rick Jacobson noted that it is likely that the State of Connecticut will ban herring take in the Connecticut River for the second season in 2003. Mr. Slater commented that the closure in Connecticut waters did not impact harvest in Massachusetts waters last season.

Mr. McMenemy indicated that the draft eel management plan would likely be ready for review this fall and Mr. Geiger urged him to make sure that the CRASC eel plan is compatible with ASMFC plan when completed.

4. CRASC Funding Initiative

The substance of this issue was covered in the discussion following the Executive Assistant's Report. Mr. McInnes pointed out that the Commission had been advised to send a letter requesting 2004 funds to legislators in January. He indicated that Ms. Rowan and he would likely travel to DC again to reiterate the CRASC needs. He said that it was important to realize continued support from the non-government organizations in this process as they have played a key role to date. Mr. Bartlett, NHFG Acting Executive Director, has offered to carry the CRASC message to the NH legislative delegation.

Mr. Geiger encouraged the CRASC to keep the effort as bipartisan as possible.

Mr. MacCallum noted that everyone is looking to the Federal Government now. The next couple of state budget cycles will be tight and many programs are likely to be cut. The Governor of Massachusetts, for example, has recently been given extraordinary powers to make budget cuts so any and all efforts to obtain additional funds are where we have to focus our energies.

5. Other Business

A sympathy card for the family of the late Mr. Dick Guertin, retired from the White River NFH, was circulated for signature.

The next CRASC meeting is scheduled for October 22, 2003.

Mr. Geiger moved to adjourn the meeting, and Mr. Regan seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:34 a.m.

CRASC Meeting Attendance
January 16, 2003

Janice Rowan	USFWS
Jaime Geiger	USFWS
Paul Pajak	USFWS
Thomas D. Menard	MA Public Representative
Wayne MacCallum	MAFW
Maryalice Fischer	PG&E National Energy Group
David Deen	Connecticut River Watershed Council
Duncan McInnes	NHFG
Caleb Slater	MAFW
Darleen Cutting	USFWS
Phil Herzig	USFWS
Darren Desmarais	USFWS
Bob Stira	Northeast Generation Services
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Ron Regan	VTFW
Peter Basta	VT Public Representative
Bob Jones	CT Public Representative
Steve Roy	USFS
Dan Call	Westfield River Watershed Association
David MacDuffee	NOAA/NMFS
Peter Colosi	NOAA/NMFS
Rick Jacobson	CTDEP